

"Oh, I love you, she cried silently. I love every part of you. Your beauty and cruelty, your kindness and ugliness. But now I know you, and you no longer frighten me. Perhaps you will again, tomorrow or the next day, but right now I love you and I'm not afraid of you. Today you are just a place."

Peyton Place, 1957

1. Happy Family

Allison could barely restrain herself when it came to reprimanding her daughter Constance. She was a somewhat fearsome child. Why ever she had named her after that witch of a mother she'd had sometimes baffled her. It was against good sense she realised now. Though the bitch had of course had her good points, being a loving parent was certainly not one of them. The good points evaded her however. Jemima silently sat closely at her feet wishfully looking up for any hint of a scrap of the fresh chicken that may just fall her way. The chicken was going to be a wonderful Sunday treat, what with the gravy, roasties and spinach. Maybe anything left over could go Jemima's way.

"Shoo Jemima! This isn't for you." Allison moved her right foot and Jemima rose of her haunches and stretched, finally looking away as she turned around, perhaps sensing no luck on the food front for now. "Yeah, you go cat, find something to do."

Constance appeared silently at the kitchen door; Allison kept quiet, aware that anything she was to say now would be pointless - given her daughter's previous demeanour in determining that she hated her mum. She may well do, Allison thought sadly, but that would have to be so. There was no way she was going out with that scoundrel of a boy from up by the highway. Vince Page would have to stay away from Constance for a few more years. Hopefully he would move his infatuation on to someone else's child or just leave Peyton Place.

"Mum?" Constance asked questioningly. Allison ignored her, busying herself with getting the remains of the stuffing into the bird's tight ass. "Mum, if you let me go this time I'll never pester you again for money or anything. All the other girls are going and, well, it would be really bad for me if I can't go." Allison moved her weight leaning on the doorframe, nervously looking down at her newly made-up nails. Jeez, she thought her mum was sometimes a fucking prude. A nice night out with Milly, Sam and Rebecca at the River Club would be so good. Maybe she'd even meet someone too.

"Allison, dear, you can't go there. You too young to be hanging around such a place, and anyway, it has a bad reputation. It's final." Indeed, that place should be bulldozed, shut or burnt down she thought. The events over the last year proved that. What was it now? Two or three shootings, a rape, and that assault on the owner, poor old Norman. He was in hospital for a good month in the city before he even got out of intensive care. Yet the police in Peyton had no ideas who had done it. At The Reporter she had asked to be put on his case but Gillas had firmly said no. "It's not why you are here, it's out of town and we need you elsewhere. The dead cops' case in Queens is more important." She had left it at that. There was no point in arguing especially when he was right. Her job was Metro Police reporting after all.

Constance grimaced, flinging her arms to her side, determined to logically show her mum that the River Club was okay and her friends could be trusted.

"Dad goes there, so why can't I?"

"He may well do, but he's a man and he knows how to look after himself. And he's not around now is he? She retorted quickly. Surely Constance doesn't think that Bill is a good role-model to follow? With his track record it wouldn't surprise her to find out he's in prison or trouble of some-sort. If he wants to play around he better well just stay away from Peyton Place and just do whatever he does elsewhere. The last thing she needed was him showing up to further pervert Constance and leading her astray more. God, the mere existence of the man was a problem.

"That Page boy's going there isn't he? Allison asked, turning to face her daughter.

"I have no idea." She answered innocently.

"He will get you into trouble. You know that. Look at who he's been around with. He's not taken any responsibility and - "

"This isn't about Vince! It's about you. You and dad isn't it? Just because he's out there doing what he wants enjoying life and you're stuck in here playing nice happy family and only caring for your image. All my friends think you're a cow." Constance screamed at her mum. "This proves it. I'm going! You can't stop me." She turned and strutted away heading for the stairs and her bedroom.

Allison was shaking with anger. Constance was so brazen about things. There was absolutely no way she was going tonight, she thought. Turning she grasped the sink edge with both hands, covered in stuffing. What could she do if Constance really did go hell or high water? Maybe Simon could call around in his uniform and talk to her. That may shake her but probably would not change much. I'd be hated for sure then. No, this has to stay here and not in the community. Simon would be sure to blab it to his busybody wife. Questions and whispers would follow like night follows day. The pressure was getting too much. All alone, there was no way she could handle the nineteen year old. Things were getting out of her control, as she had always dreaded and always known would happen one day. Weeping she held tighter trying without success to hold her emotions in check. Sniffing she washed her hands, drying them on the tea towel and putting the chicken in the oven.

Jemima meowed from behind her looking at the oven where her erstwhile chicken meal was safely out of reach. Allison reached down and swept the cat from the floor, nuzzling her face.

"Now you won't leave me will you. Hey? No. I think you will be here forever waiting for food won't you Jemmy?" From the hallway the sound of the telephone rang. Jemima looked toward the door, "Yes, we'd better get that, hadn't we."

The phone display showed it was Gillas. Very strange she thought, he never calls when it was convenient. He must have some job for me to do in the morning. I need the money.

"Hi ya Gillas. What's up?" Allison answered; glad to have her dark mood distracted by her boss and prospect of something to do over the weekend. Maybe he'd ask her out. Yeah right.

"Are you busy tomorrow?"

"Nope." She quickly ran the next day through her mind. "Not a thing."

"NYP has a statement coming out at eight in the morning. Something about the funding cuts from upstate. We need you there to the low-down."

"At City Hall? Is Pearson going to be there?"

"It's going to be at the 7th Precinct. And, no the commissioner isn't expected. Supposed to be some guy from Homicide. What he has to do with funding god knows. You find out."

Allison did not mind who was going to be there. It would have been nice to catch-up with Pearson though. He had been her main point of contact ever since she got this job, after McCall's had gone bankrupt. That had been a difficult time for her. Giving up the dream of having a novel published seemed the most painful thing of her life, second after of course finding out that she was a bastard child and her father unknown. That was a long time ago, she thought. Terrible memories suddenly swarmed in her head as clearly and painfully as she had experienced that long Indian summer. Her mother screaming at her over something about Norman, Nellie Cross hanging in her closet and Kathy's accident at the Labor Day fair.

"Maybe they're threatening industrial action... that'll be a good story. Okay. I'll be there for a quarter to eight. Neil will be there won't he?" Neil was the paper's photographer, who amusingly seemed a bit out of place on the paper. With a penchant for heavy metal and carrying around his Gibson guitar in his old Ford he just seemed destined not to be an award winning photo journalist but a performer. He was always fun though. His humor and quick wittedness will be sure to keep Allison alert and smiling on a blazing Saturday morning in the city.

"Yes. He'll be there." Gillas answered almost impatiently "Make sure he gets pictures this time will you? I've got to get going. We're going to some play in the Village. Peter insists it will change my life."

Allison smiled, almost laughing aloud. Peter and Gillas were a fantastic couple so suited that it was like being a voyeur when you saw them were together.

"You better not change Gillas – you're perfect as you are."

After she had put the telephone down, she felt herself begin to shift gears and resolve to sort out Constance for the night. Maybe she had better just let her go. A moody teenager she did not need tonight and come the morning there was no way she could bare to confront her. Constance would storm out and go to have her fun and she would have to deal with it afterward. Life would be hell if that happened.

Going back into the kitchen, she sat down at the small table in the underneath the white shelves, with its chequered blue tablecloth folded on one side and the crystal glass vase of slightly wilting yellow flowers. Opening the pack of cigarettes on the table, she lit one, taking a deep breath she felt a wave of relief wend its way through her tense body.

When she had finished the smoke she went to speak to Constance. Surprisingly, telling her she could go to the River Club went down without the joy she had expected. Maybe she was sorry for the shouting match they'd had barely fifteen minutes ago.

"Mum," she said, "you know I'll be careful. I wish you'd trust me." Allison could see that Constance was upset for she just sat there, obviously exhausted and with damp eyes.

Seating herself at the end of the bed Allison held her hand and hugged her. "I do trust you. It's just that things scare me when I can't be there for you. You have grown-up so fast. It seems like a day since I brought you home from the hospital and just looked on you with a feeling of joy so amazing. "You're my baby no matter how old you are."

Constance was crying, tears running down her pale cheek onto her mum's crochet top. "I know mum. I know."

As seven o'clock approached, Constance hurried getting herself looking nice. With her auburn hair up and a little bob framing her face, she was happy. A black set comprising a shortish skirt and halter neck top, perfect for her tall skinny body looked just fine she reckoned. Now, the big test - will mum say it's okay? Of course, she'd worn it before and her mum hadn't barked at her, so why would she this time? Grabbing her long black coat and knapsack, she went downstairs just as Rebecca's mum tooted her horn outside.

"You look fine," her mother reassured her. "Ring me if you are staying with the girls tonight." Allison said trying to be as cheerful as possible, yet nervous at seeing Constance leave for the night. "Or if something happens, right?"

"Yes mum." Smiling, Constance run over to her and quickly hugged her good bye, turning and running for the front door.

"Bye mum." With that, she was gone, running for Mrs Spein's new sedan. Looking out were both Rebecca and her mum. When Allison stood at the door they smiled and waved, as if they were going on a holiday, full of happiness and not a care in the world.

Waving back she saw Constance slide into the back seat and turn to greet her friend, probably similarly dressed. The car took off down the street. She watched until after it had turned the corner of Elm Street and the new café that had been built in the place of the burned-down Thrifty Corner. Beech Street was still bathed in the evening sun of late August and with the early fall leaves golden; a surreal quite had descended the neighbourhood.

At around about ten-thirty Constance and her friends were seated laughing and speculating on the boys in the River Club. Milly was wearing her usual tight denim jeans with black faux-leather jacket, Sam superbly dressed and ready to kill in a mini skirt, blouse and heels, and Rebecca in tight hot pants and a multi-coloured top that seemed perhaps too bright for the occasion.

The copious amounts of alcohol they had all consumed with youthful haste had truly done its work in loosening their moods. They were reliant on the table just to keep themselves upright, it seemed. Then, that could have been just the fun they were having.

Despite the laughs and jokes Sam was slightly pensive about being let-down by Vince. They all liked him and he was always a good ego boost to their delicate confidence.

"Vince could have said he wasn't going to be here.